

Citizens Coordinating Committee on Friendship Heights

March 6, 2016

Council President Floreen and Councilmembers Leventhal, Riemer,
Berliner and Elrich
County Council Office Building
100 Maryland Avenue
Rockville, Maryland 20850

Re: Citizens Coordinating Committee
Comments to Marlene Michaelson's
Report on the Westbard Sector Plan

Dear Council President Floreen and Councilmembers Leventhal, Riemer, Berliner and Elrich:

We compliment Ms. Michaelson for her comprehensive and well organized March 3rd analysis of the Planning Board's draft plan. We agree with the main thrust of her comments – that the amount of development proposed should be reduced. However, for many properties, we strongly disagree with the amount of reduction recommended. It should be reduced further.

SITE 1 – WESTWOOD SHOPPING CENTER

We agree with staff's recommended reduced commercial density. We agree with the recommendation for civic use indoors on the site. We disagree that the goals of trying to maintain smaller, local, more service oriented businesses and accommodating existing businesses will be achieved by the existing language in the proposed Sector Plan. The language is too general and weak. We do not share the optimism of the Staff Report that a letter by the property owner of his intent to implement the goals is sufficient, especially since there was testimony before the Board that representations by the property owner to existing tenants were inconsistent with achieving the goals. The language needs strengthening including precluding large stores, other than a grocery store.

SITE 2 – MANOR CARE SITE

We agree with the recommendation that the site be limited to townhouses at a lower FAR, and no commercial. We agree with the height limit of 45 feet for the townhouses not along Ridgefield but disagree that the height along Ridgefield may be 55 feet.

- 55 feet is too high (urban) for a suburban center.
- The site's topography makes the height appear higher
- 90 feet height is proposed for Westwood II on the other side of Ridgefield, giving Ridgefield on both sides a non-suburban scale.

Representing the Citizens Associations of Brookdale, Chevy Chase Village, Chevy Chase West, Drummond, Glen Echo Heights, Green Acres-Glen Cove, Kenwood, Kenwood Condominium, Kenwood House Cooperative, Kenwood Place Condominium, Mohican Hills, Somerset, Springfield, Sumner, Sumner Village Condominium, Westmoreland, Westbard Mews, Westwood Mews, and Wood Acres

- The site is part of the R-60 single-family home Springfield community and the townhouses are next to and confronting lower single family homes.

The Zoning Code permits roof top uses with walls/structures up to 8 feet tall which are not counted as part of height. The height limit for the site must expressly state that it is inclusive of roof top structure.

SITE 3 – WESTWOOD II

We disagree with the recommendation that the height limit can be 75 feet to 90 feet to be decided at site plan. This height is inconsistent with a suburban center scale, especially when topography will make the building appear taller and will tower over the adjacent homes in Springfield as well as be readily visible from Kenwood homes on the opposite side of River Road from the site. A 45 foot height limit should be placed on this site.

The purpose of up to a 90 foot height limit is that it is not consistent good planning and not compatible with nearby residential properties, but that it may facilitate the naturalization of Willett Branch and establish a linear park. However, there is nothing in the plan that ties the granting of any height above 45 feet to such a public amenity.

SITE 4 – HOC EQUITY ONE PROPERTY

We agree with the staff recommendation with the following reservation. Additional analysis is need to make sure the development authorized leaves room for stream buffer/park area and for a playground space for children housed on the site as well as children in other housing on Westbard.

SITE 5 – BOWLMOR, GAS STATION AND STORAGE BUILDING

We disagree with the 110 foot height. It is inconsistent with a suburban center. It also results in, along with other proposed residential buildings on Westbard Avenue, an excessive total number of dwelling units and further lacks supporting infrastructure, e.g., parks and playgrounds. We recommend a 75 foot height limit and a corresponding lowering of FAR.

SITE 6A AND 6B – PARK BETHESDA

We agree with the Staff recommendations with respect to parcel 6a. With respect to parcel 6b, however, we disagree with the height of 110 feet and the FAR of 2.5, which will allow 500 new units to be build on the Park Bethesda property. The height here should be reduced to a maximum of 75 feet and the FAR should be reduced to 1.5. Five hundred units here is excessive, particularly in conjunction with the several hundred existing units at Park Bethesda and the additional units that would be added by other proposed residential development along Westbard Avenue, and the absence of supporting parks and playgrounds. We do not object to the percentages on MPDUs and WFHUs in the last paragraph of the staff memo.

**SITE 7 – AMERICAN PLANT FOOD, APA,
ROOF CENTER, TALBERT’S AND McDONALD’S**

We agree with the McDonald’s parcel recommendation of retaining the current CRT 0.75 and height of 50 feet. This property should be subject to a floating zone for future development at an FAR of 1.5 to 2.0 and 45 feet in height, rather than the staff recommended 1.5 – 2.5 FAR and 75 foot height. Our requested lower density and height is what we are asking for properties all along the River Road corridor as it is more compatible with a suburban center compared to an urban center.

Accordingly, for American Plant Food, Roof Center and Talbert’s, we also request an FAR of 1.5 – 2.0 and a height of 45 feet, not an FAR of 3.0 and a height of 75 feet. Explicit in the staff recommendations for this height and extraordinary density is that it will “incentivize” providing naturalizing Willet Branch and other amenities. However, there is no provision of the plan conditioning the greater density and height on the implementation of such amenities.

**SITE 8 – KENWOOD STATION SHOPPING CENTER
(INCLUDES WHOLE FOODS AND SUNOCO GAS STATION)**

We agree with the recommendation to retain the existing zoning and adding a floating zone. The floating zone should permit a 1.5 – 2.0 FAR and a height of 45 feet. This would be consistent with our recommendation for properties on the River Road corridor to maintain suburban scale and prevent a “walling in” of the corridor. It is especially required here due to the townhouses and single family houses in adjoining Kenwood community.

SITE 9 – KENWOOD STORAGE

We agree with the staff recommendation that the existing zoning remain, which is a 40 foot height limit. We disagree that this could be raised to 45 feet in height under a floating zone. In setting a 40 feet height, the Board and its staff had before it photographs submitted by Jenny Sue Dunner showing the adverse effect of the existing 42 foot storage facility, creating a wall looming over the adjacent Kenwood single family homes. Perhaps the Council staff did not have the benefit of those photos in recommending an increase in height to 45 feet.

Because of the adjacent Kenwood homes, we request that the floating zone require not only a 40 foot height limit, inclusive of roof top structure, but also residential be limited to townhouses and any commercial use be discouraged.

SITE 10 – GAS STATION, DANCE STUDIO AND BANK

We agree with the staff recommendation except the floating zone should have an FAR of 1.5 – 2.0 and a height of 45 feet to which is consistent with what we have recommended for other properties along River Road to be more consistent with a suburban center and prevent a “walling” effect along River Road.

In making changes to the proposed Sector Plan, care should be taken to not delete the Plan's references to the fact that gas stations are acceptable uses under the Plan.

SITE 11 – STORAGE, 7-ELEVEN AND GAS STATIONS

We agree with the staff recommendation except the floating zone FAR should be 1.5 – 2.0 and height of 45 feet for reasons discussed above.

SITE 12 – GAS STATION

We agree with the staff recommendation except the floating zone height should be limited to 45 feet for the reasons discussed above.

SITE 13 – KENWOOD TOWER

We disagree with the staff recommendation to approve an FAR of 3.0 and 90 foot height. The existing building's 90 foot height limit is too tall and literally sticks out like a sore thumb. The proposed height and density is inconsistent with a suburban scale. If the existing building is demolished, there is no reason to permit its replacement at such a height and density. The existing building should be "grandfathered" but a replacement building subject to an FAR of 1.5 – 2.0 and 45 feet in height, which is consistent with our recommendation for the properties along River Road.

SITES 14 AND 15 – NORTH RIVER ROAD DISTRICT

We agree with the staff's concern as to the legal viability of trying to reference a list of binding elements from the prior approved PD-28 zone as binding on the sites' development and endorse the Sector Plan specify the list of relevant provisions. The recommendation states staff will work with Planning Development staff to determine which elements of the binding conditions should be referenced in the Sector Plan. Since the PD-28 binding elements were placed on the property at the request of the Citizens Coordinating Committee on Friendship Heights' attorney during the PD-28 rezoning proceedings, **the Citizens Coordinating Committee requests the opportunity for its attorney to meet with the staff to make its views known as to which elements are essential for specification in the Plan, such as the requirement that the River Road/Landy Lane entrance be maintained and a traffic signal at that intersection be funded by the developers.**

Site 14

The Washington Episcopal School (WES) is located on 10 acres. The Council approved PD-28 rezoning and its the Development Plan provides for 175,000 square feet of school use at 55 feet height and an FAR of about 0.40; no commercial. We agree with the staff recommendation that the height should be limited to 55 feet and FAR of 0.50 rather than the 1.0 FAR of the Board. However, we disagree with the staff recommendation of a C 0.50 FAR, since no commercial is authorized under the PD-28 zoning.

Staff has also recommended a floating zone of CRT 1, H55, with a residential/commercial mix to be determined at time of rezoning. This creates the possibility of about 450,000 square feet of commercial or 450,000 square feet of residential or some mix. This is huge. No more commercial is needed in the Westbard area. It is a particularly inappropriate site for commercial, located adjacent to single family detached homes of Kenwood and Somerset. The floating zone should permit no commercial and the FAR for residential should be 0.50 – 1.0 which would permit hundreds of dwelling units.

Further, the staff recommended use and amount of development would be an incentive to WES to sell with the community losing the open space of the athletic fields and other desirable features associated with the school.

Site 15

This is a one acre location of 121 dwelling unit facility for senior housing approved by the Council as part of the PD-28 rezoning. The Planning Board approved a CRT 4.75, C-O – 0.75, H-97 purportedly to accommodate the approved PD-28 senior housing. However, the PD-28 has no commercial and the FAR is 3.25 not 4.75. Staff recommends that this zoning be approved if senior housing is built. We request the FAR be lowered to 3.25 which more accurately reflects what is required, as well as to delete the commercial.

Staff recommends that it not be used for senior housing. The zoning should be “CRT 2.5, C 0.75, C [sic – should be R] 1.75 and H 97”. The 97 feet height was solely to accommodate senior housing. It is too high and totally inconsistent with the height called for generally along River Road. If there is no senior housing, the zoning should be as we requested on the remainder of the WES site. CRT 0.50 – 1.0, all residential with a height of 55 feet.

SOUTH RIVER DISTRICT

We agree with the staff's recommendation.

SOUTHWESTBARD DISTRICT

We agree with the staff's recommendation that the floating zone on the library site be deleted but we disagree that the site continues to be listed as an appropriate one for affordable housing.

COMMUNITY FACILITIES AND PARKS

We continue to endorse the need for a senior community facility. We continue to question the adequacy of open space/civic green consisting of less than 1/2 acre re – such as only 1/3 acre proposed on the Westwood Shopping Center. (Staff Rep. p. 5).

In view of the large number of residential units that are likely to be added and the absence of parks and playgrounds for children, particularly those living in multifamily buildings,

we also believe that there is inadequate area for parks and playgrounds in the immediate proximity to the proposed dwelling units permitted on Westbard Avenue.

REDUCTION OF THE OVERALL NUMBER OF NET NEW RESIDENTIAL UNITS

Last, but not least, we continue to believe that even with the recommendations by staff, the Sector Plan would result in way too many residential units. It appears from the information we have that the number of residential units in the Planning Board draft plan would not be reduced appreciably. Compounding this, there is insufficient information to determine the actual total number of residential units that would be permitted and the likely number that would be built.

Respectfully submitted,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Lloyd Guerci". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Lloyd Guerci, Chair
Citizens Coordinating Committee on
Friendship Heights

cc: Marlene Michaelson